

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA  
WAYCROSS DIVISION

201 SEP 17 P 2:44

MICHAEL A. JOHNSON,

Plaintiff,

v.

STEPHEN L. JACKSON, Ware  
County Superior Court Judge, and  
RICHARD E. CURRIE, Ware  
County District Attorney,

Defendants.

CIVIL ACTION NO.: CV507-060

**MAGISTRATE JUDGE'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Plaintiff, who was detained at Ware County Jail in Waycross, Georgia, filed an action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. A detainee proceeding in a civil action against officers or employees of government entities must comply with the mandates of the Prison Litigation Reform Act, 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915 & 1915A. In determining compliance, the court shall be guided by the longstanding principle that *pro se* pleadings are entitled to liberal construction. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520, 92 S. Ct. 594, 596, 30 L. Ed. 2d 652 (1972); Walker v. Dugger, 860 F.2d 1010, 1011 (11th Cir. 1988).

28 U.S.C. § 1915A requires a district court to screen the complaint for cognizable claims before or as soon as possible after docketing. The court must dismiss the complaint or any portion of the complaint that is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary damages from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(1) and (2).

In Mitchell v. Farcass, 112 F.3d 1483, 1490 (11th Cir. 1997), the Eleventh Circuit interpreted the language contained in § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii), which is nearly identical to that contained in the screening provisions at § 1915A(b). As the language of § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) closely tracks the language of Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), the court held that the same standards for determining whether to dismiss for failure to state a claim under Rule 12(b)(6) should be applied to prisoner complaints filed pursuant to § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii). Mitchell, 112 F.3d at 1490. The Court may dismiss a complaint for failure to state a claim only where it appears beyond a doubt that a *pro se* litigant can prove no set of facts that would entitle him to relief. Hughes v. Rowe, 449 U.S. 5, 10, 101 S. Ct. 173, 176, 66 L. Ed. 2d 163 (1980); Mitchell, 112 F.3d at 1490. While the court in Mitchell interpreted § 1915(e), its interpretation guides this Court in applying the identical language of § 1915A.

Plaintiff alleges he was arrested and sent to jail, and that, while he was in jail, he was indicted. Plaintiff asserts he did not have a preliminary hearing, nor was he arraigned. Plaintiff contends Judge Stephen Jackson and District Attorney Richard Currie allowed him to be bound over to the grand jury without having these hearings. Plaintiff asserts Judge Jackson denied his bond on two occasions without reason. Plaintiff wishes to sue Judge Jackson and District Attorney Currie for false imprisonment, pain and suffering, punitive damages, mental anguish, and "defamation of character". (Compl., p. 6). Plaintiff would like the shoplifting and aggravated assault charges filed against him dismissed.

In general, the distinction between claims which may be brought under § 1983 and those which must be brought as habeas petitions is now reasonably well settled.

Claims in which prisoners assert that they are being subjected to unconstitutional punishment not imposed as part of their sentence, such as, for example, being exposed to an excessive amount of force, are § 1983 actions, not habeas actions. See, e.g., Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 114 S. Ct. 1970, 128 L. Ed. 2d 811 (1994). Habeas actions, in contrast, are those that explicitly or by necessary implication challenge a prisoner's conviction or the sentence imposed on him by (or under the administrative system implementing the judgment of) a court. Thus, for example, when a prisoner makes a claim that, if successful, could shorten his term of imprisonment, the claim must be brought as a habeas petition, not as a § 1983 claim. See, e.g., Edwards v. Balisok, 520 U.S. 641, 117 S. Ct. 1584, 137 L. Ed. 2d 906 (1997); Heck v. Humphrey, 512 U.S. 477, 114 S. Ct. 2364, 129 L. Ed. 2d 383 (1994). In other words,

to recover damages for allegedly unconstitutional conviction or imprisonment, or for other harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid, a § 1983 plaintiff must prove that the conviction or sentence has been reversed on direct appeal, expunged by executive order, declared invalid by a state tribunal authorized to make such determination, or called into question by a federal court's issuance of a writ of habeas corpus, 28 U.S.C. § 2254. A claim for damages bearing that relationship to a conviction or sentence that has *not* been so invalidated is not cognizable under § 1983. Thus, when a state prisoner seeks damages in a § 1983 suit, the district court must consider whether a judgment in favor of the plaintiff would necessarily imply the invalidity of his conviction or sentence; if it would, the complaint must be dismissed unless the plaintiff can demonstrate that the conviction or sentence has already been invalidated. But if the district court determines that the plaintiff's action, even if successful, will *not* demonstrate the invalidity of any outstanding criminal judgment against the plaintiff, the action should be allowed to proceed, in the absence of some other bar to the suit.

Heck, 512 U.S. at 486-87, 114 S. Ct. at 2372-73 (emphasis in original). Based on this settled distinction, the claims at issue and the relief sought here are far more analogous to those in habeas petitions rather than § 1983 actions.

Additionally, when a detainee challenges the “fact or duration of his physical imprisonment, and the relief he seeks is a determination that he is entitled to immediate release or a speedier release from that imprisonment, his sole federal remedy is a writ of habeas corpus.” Harden v. Pataki, 320 F.3d 1289, 1294 n.6 (11th Cir. 2003)(quoting Preiser v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 475, 500, 93 S. Ct. 1827, 1841, 36 L. Ed. 2d 439 (1973)). However, Plaintiff must exhaust his available state remedies before a federal court can address these claims.

Even if Plaintiff’s claims were properly brought pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, he fails to state a cognizable claim. Plaintiff contends that Defendant Richard Currie, the District Attorney for Ware County, is liable for the alleged violations of his constitutional rights. However, a prosecutor is immune from liability under the doctrine of prosecutorial immunity for actions taken within the scope of his office. Imbler v. Pachtman, 424 U.S. 409, 430, 96 S. Ct. 984, 995, 47 L. Ed. 2d 128 (1976). Prosecutorial immunity in § 1983 suits is derived from judicial immunity. Id. at 427, 96 S. Ct. at 991. Policies supporting prosecutorial immunity include concerns “that harassment by unfounded litigation would cause a deflection of the prosecutor’s energies from his public duties and the possibility that he would shade his decisions instead of exercising the independence of judgment required by his public trust.” Id. As Plaintiff has not alleged that Defendant Currie acted outside the scope of his position, Plaintiff cannot maintain a claim against Defendant Currie.

Additionally, Congress did not abrogate the doctrine of judicial immunity when it enacted section 1983. Judicial immunity is an absolute immunity, and it applies even when a judge acts maliciously. Stump v. Sparkman, 435 U.S. 349, 356, 98 S. Ct. 1099,

1104, 55 L. Ed. 2d 331 (1978)(holding judicial immunity doctrine applies in § 1983 actions); Harris v. Deveau, 780 F.2d 911, 914 (11th Cir. 1986). Absolute immunity not only protects against liability but also against a case going to trial at all. Harris, 780 F.2d at 914 (citing Mitchell v. Forsyth, 472 U.S. 511, 526, 105 S. Ct. 2806, 2815, 86 L. Ed.2d 411 (1985)). To determine whether a judge is entitled to absolute immunity from money damages under section 1983, a two-part test was established in Stump: 1) whether the judge dealt with the plaintiff in a judicial capacity; and 2) whether the judge acted in the "clear absence of all jurisdiction." Id. (quoting Stump, 435 U.S. at 357, 98 S. Ct. at 1105). The second prong of this test is "only satisfied if a judge completely lacks subject matter jurisdiction." Id. at 916. As Plaintiff has not shown Judge Stephen Jackson lacked subject matter jurisdiction in denying his request for a bond, Plaintiff's claims against Defendant Jackson cannot be sustained.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the foregoing, it is my **RECOMMENDATION** that Plaintiff's Complaint be **DISMISSED** for his failure to state a cognizable claim pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

**SO REPORTED and RECOMMENDED**, this 17<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2007.

  
JAMES E. GRAHAM  
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE